

# BRASS PACIFICA

**Art Form: Music**

**Style: Classical to Modern**

**Culture: Multicultural**

## MEET THE ARTIST:

**Brass Pacifica** was founded in 1995 by five accomplished brass instrumentalists from in and around the Los Angeles basin. These musicians were drawn together by a desire to make extraordinary music and to be encouraged by the musicianship of other fine players. The group is composed of *Jason Foltz* (trumpet), *David Costello* (trumpet), *Liesl Perkins* (French horn), *Steve Suminski* (Trombone) and *Chuck Koontz* (tuba). Since the ensemble's inception, the members have dedicated themselves to the performance and study of chamber music with players from the Canadian Brass, Empire Brass, American Brass, Atlantic Brass and St. Louis Brass. Recently, the group concluded an extensive residency with the Grand Theatre in Ellsworth, Maine, which was funded through a grant provided by Chamber Music America and the National Endowment for the Arts. An award winning quintet, they have also participated in numerous competitions.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Brass family instruments are known for their ringing tones, monumental fanfare and bold sounds. Brass Pacifica presents a roaring, exciting celebration of the family of musical instruments known as "brass." With music that ranges from Mozart to Mancini, these five talented brass soloists use two trumpets, a horn, trombone and tuba to showcase and explore brass music. Audiences are given background information on the instruments and songs as they listen to and enjoy such selections as the Shaker hymn, *Simple Gifts*, the delightfully sneaky *Pink Panther* by Henry Mancini, and the rousing *William Tell Overture* by Rossini. Audiences are offered non-stop interaction, which includes working on heightening listening skills, rhythm techniques and instrument discovery. Students will have an opportunity to ask questions and one will even have a chance at being a "guest conductor."



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## PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Straight and curling animal horns produced the first musical horn sounds and served as prototypes for modern brass instruments. Long horns were used to call people together and the curling ram's horn (shofar) was, and still is, played in Jewish services of celebration. Some of these early animal horns developed into trumpets of silver, fashioned by the Egyptians in 1320 BC. In Africa, plenty of horned animals allow for "one man – one note," playing trumpet-style into a hole on the side of the instrument, near the tip.

The *trumpet* was used by Roman armies to call their troops to battle. Usually playing the melody, it continues to be the instrument of choice for marches and military parades. The *tuba*, consisting of gruff, lower-pitched sounds, adds the richest, fullest tone to the brass section. In fact, it gives a foundational rhythm for the whole piece. The *French horn*, one of the trickiest instruments to play, has a smooth, fluid quality. The bell of the horn faces backwards, making it easy to control the timbre and pitch of the sound with the player's hand. *Trombones* range in pitch between the higher sounding trumpets and the lower sounding tubas, but has the added ability to slide (*glissando*) between notes.

Both old and new brass instruments produce their sounds by vibrating the lips into a mouthpiece, unlike some woodwinds which use a reed. Early brass instruments could only play a few notes. So, in order to produce a greater variety of tones, players used tubings of different lengths, which varied the air columns in their instruments. These tubes were called "crooks." The crooks had to be changed constantly by the players while performing a piece. Eventually, valves were invented to change the tube length mechanically. Sounds can also be altered by lengthening or shortening the tubing, as demonstrated by the trombone, or by moving the hand around inside the instrument, as in the *French Horn* or *trumpet*.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What words come to mind that describe your impressions of the brass sounds?
- Read about the instruments in “Preparing for the Experience,” then discuss the differences in size and pitch for each type. What do they each have in common?
- Discuss the use of the hand or the mutes and how they each affect the sound.
- Which of the instruments might you want to learn to play? What about that particular instrument attracts or interests you?
- Have you ever heard or seen these instruments being played elsewhere? If so, describe the scene and the type of music being played

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

Read stories in which instruments are featured or even take on the personalities of different characters.

Books suitable for students K-2 include: *The Little Brass Band* by Margaret Wise Brown; *The Toy Trumpet* by Ann Grifalconi; *Loudmouth George and the Cornet* by Nancy Carlson; and *Classical Cats – A Children’s Introduction to the Orchestra* by David Chesky (includes CD and book).

Students in grades 4-6 may enjoy *If I Only Had a Horn- The Young Louis Armstrong* by Roxane Orgill; *The Canadian Brass Book* by Rick Walters; and *The Orchestra* by Mark Rubin and Alan Daniel.

Have small groups each read different books. Then have them discuss the ideas and characters in the book within their groups. Finally, ask them to introduce the characters of the story and interpret each one through playacting. Someone in the group might be selected to state the title, introduce the characters and give a summary of the story in his/her own words.



Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ Alone or in groups, design a poster to promote Brass music, featuring some or all of the instruments. Think about the features you want to emphasize, as well as the colors and the shapes. In what setting might you place them? Use photos of the instruments in order to see their characteristics clearly.
- ❖ Play a march and ask students to work in partners or groups of four to create a series of 3-4 marching patterns that last for 32 counts of music. Some choices are: marching in place, going forward, turning sharply, marching in a square, triangle or circular path, adding hand and arm gestures.
- ▶ Brainstorm and discuss the ways in which horns have been used throughout history, such as: (1) signals or communication tools in battles, calling people together, fanfare, etc.; (2) a means of entertainment or celebration for royalty, military, jazz and school bands; (3) spiritual or symbolic uses.
- ▶ Research American composers of music that included brass. Divide the class into collaborative groups of four or five students and assign each group a composer. Suggest that they use musical recordings, library books, the internet and periodicals to create a composer’s corner display for the class. Here are some possible choices: Scott Joplin, Thelonius Monk, Leonard Bernstein, Duke Ellington, Charles Ives, Aaron Copland, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.
- ⇒ Identify, list and discuss the characteristics of each instrument. Note the differences and the similarities.
- \* Select two of the instruments and think about what kind of personalities each might have. Define the characteristics of each instrument, then write a dialogue that might take place between them. Focus the dialogue on themes such as: where will they go to dinner; what kind of a pet will they adopt; what sport will they watch on TV together. Present your dialogue to the class.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY/WEBLINKS:

All of the books listed above under “Framework Focus” are available at Amazon.com.

[www.Brasspacifica.com](http://www.Brasspacifica.com)